suggestion of Government of India the State Government of Kerala has submitted the revised proposal to National Horticulture Board to avail the assistance for setting up of cold storages and post harvest management facilities at the cost of Rs. 368.50 lakhs. National Horticulture Board has examined the proposal and sought some clarifications from State Government. The final reply from the State Government is awaited.

Coconut Farming System

2044. SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Kerala Govemment has submitted a project for development of coconut farming system in Kerala seeking financial assistance for implementation of the same; and

(b) if so, the details of the project and Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) and (b) The Government of Kerala has submitted a Project for Development of Coconut Fanning in Kerala, which envisages to increase production and productivity of the crop through replanting the diseased, senile, old and unproductive palms and better management in existing palms. Most of the measures suggested in the project are already - being supported under various programmes of the Coconut Development Board. During 1997-98, out of a total allocation of Rs. 19.75 crores for various coconut development programmes, the Board released Rs. 10.28 crores to the State of Kerala. For the year 1998-99, an allocation of Rs. 10.41 crores has been made for Kerala.

Help to Cotton Growing Farmers

2045. DR. D. VENKATESHWAR RAO: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) the reasons for declining prices of cotton; and

(b) the steps propose to help cotton growing farmers in their districts?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) and (b) The prices of cotton which had declined recently due to peak harvest season have started increasing as in evident from the Wholesale Price indices given below:-

August	377.1
September	370.4
October	361.9
November	367.3

The prices are currently ruling much above the minimum support levels.

The Cotton Corporation of India (CCI) as nodal agency of the Government makes purchases for price support as and when the market prices touch the minimum support prices. The CCI also makes purchases under commercial operations as well as for export purposes.

Cotton Production

2046. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that cotton crop for 1997-98 was 11.4 million bales against 14.3 million bales for 1996-97 as a result of which, cotton had to be imported for domestic use; and

(b) if so, what steps Government have taken to improve indigenous production to meet the growing demand in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) According to the official estimates, the production of cotton during 1997-98 is estimated to be 11.2 million bales as against 14.3 million bales in 1996-97. During 1997-98, due to lower cotton production particularly of long and extra long staple varieties and also in view of the prevailing lower international prices of cotton *vis-a-vis* domestic prices, the textile mills had reported to import of 4 lakh bales of cotton.

(b) With a view to increasing production and productivity a centrally sponsored scheme namely. Intensive Cotton Development Programme is being implemented in 11 major cotton growing States. Under the scheme assistance is provided for production of breeder seeds; distribution of certified seeds;

demonstration on production technology, pheromone traps and NPV (Nuclear Polyhydrosis Virus); integrated pest management demonstration-cum-training (IPM); distribution of Plant protection equipments; supply of sprinkler sets; farmers training and contingency for monitoring etc.

Shortage of Onions

2047. DR. B.B. DUTTA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether there was a shortage of onions, recently;

(b) what was the extent of shortfall in production of onion;

(c) if so, the reasons therefor;

(d) whether the shortage of onions was further complicated by market manipulators; and

(e) if so, steps taken by Government to ease the supply position of onion in the country?

THE MINISTER OT STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) to (c) Yes, Sir. There was a shortage of onions recently due to an estimated shortfall of 7.48 lakh tonnes in the production of onion during 1997-98 due to adverse agro climatic conditions. The supply position of onion got aggravated due to untimely rains in current Kharif season which reduced the production of major onion producing states like Maharashtra by 26% Gujarat by 18%, Uttar Pradesh by 34%, Orissa by 27% and Karnataka by 24%.

(d) and (e) The marketing of onions takes place in an open market environment where market forces play their role in response to gap between demand and supply position. In order to ease the supply position of onion, the Union Govemment has initiated a scheme of public distribution of onions at a subsidised rate of Rs. 10 per kg from 14.7.98 through the static and mobile outlets of Delhi State Civil Supplies Corporation, Super Bazar, Apna Bazar, NCCF and Central Distributing Centres of NAFED. The Govemment has also banned the export of onion and put it on OGL at zero rate of duty.

Reports of Suicides Committed by Farmers

2048. SHRI GHUFRAN AZAM:
DR. Y. LAKSHMI PRASAD:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether a large number of farmers have committed suicide in the month of November, 1998 in various parts of the country since they were in heavy debt and their crops have been damaged due to natural calamities;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the concerned State Governments have failed to protect such farmers; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and steps contemplated by the Union Government to adopt any strategy so that farmers throughout the country are not forced to commit suicide?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) to (d) The information is being collected and will be laid on the Table of the Sabha.

Distribution of Spurious and Inferior Quality Seeds

2049. SHRIMATI URMILABEN CHIMANBHAI PATEL: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have received complaints regarding distribution of spurious and inferior quality seeds to the farmers in the country;

(b) if so, the number of cases registered during the past two years, State-wise; and

(c) the target fixed for distribution of improved variety seeds for Kharif and Rabi crops in Gujarat during the year 1999?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SOMPAL): (a) and (d) Some State Governments have reported receiving complaints of spurious and inferior quality seeds. Details of number of cases reported are enclosed as Statement-I.

(c) the details are given in Statement-Il.